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ABSTRACT

Emphasis is placed on the role of legislation and laws as factors in the growth of school psychology, which growth has, by design, paralleled that of special education. The limited functions of the school psychologists are viewed as resulting from the special education legislation which mandated supportive services. The author complains that the school psychologist "is a service," not part of the total instructional program. His image is narrow and limiting. Awareness of the disappearance of an early state department bias which favored school psychology is noted. The author concludes that the school psychologist must maintain his primary role in evaluating the handicapped, but must develop other competencies as well. (TL)

THE ROLE OF STATE DEPARTMENTS AS PROJECTORS OF THE PUBLIC IMAGE OF SCHOOL PSYCHOLOGISTS*

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Although the subject to which I've been asked to address myself seems overly complicated already, perhaps the title of this talk should be a little longer. The addition I would make would also emphasize the role of legislation and laws as factors in the growth of our profession. I think that if we have a serious problem (and I think we do) in the matter of self and other image, that problem has a direct relationship to the laws which have caused the profession of school psychology to grow in the schools in the first place.

The growth of school psychology has paralelled the growth of special education and not by coincidence. In those states such as New Jersey in which there are large numbers of school psychologists employed in the schools, there usually are also mandatory laws requiring schools to have school psychologists for the purpose of evaluating handicapped children. We are in the schools in number because we have been seen as necessary to successful special education programs. We are considered part of "special education services" for a logical, if not for what all of us would agree is a good reason. We're a service that helps the main thing, special education, go on and we have been seen as essential to it. We have not enjoyed the same relationship to the regular education program.

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In our journals, at our meetings, and in private conversations, we have endlessly debated the reasons why the public, teachers, and parents persist in seeing us as testers primarily if not exclusively involved with the ten or fifteen percent of children who are handicapped. In my view, the root cause is that legally we are there now and have been right along for precisely that purpose. In the eyes of most educators and the public, we are worth paying for and worthwhile to have around primarily because we try to help the handicapped and not because of other skills which the well-trained psychologist might offer.

How the special education laws came about is also important. The general public did not clamor for laws mandating that there be school psychologists. The handicapped childrens' parent groups did raise such a clamor and got the support and sympathy of the parents of normal children. Laws were enacted which either mandated, funded or both mandated and funded special education programs. Attached to these laws was the school psychologist as part of the supportive services.

Indeed, psychologists were recognized by parent, legislator and the public as having expertise essential to good special education programs. The reasons for this recognition were skills and competencies assumed to be part of the training of applied psychologists: giving I.Q. and personality tests, making educational recommendations on the basis of evaluation, reporting results to parents and teachers. These are the sorts of things the public can understand and when money is involved in a new law arguments

based on things that represent concrete services are useful to the passage of that law.

The image - the public mental picture or idea - that emerges concerning the school psychologist is inevitably that of the person who works with handicapped children and their parents and primarily does testing. He is not part of the total instructional program so much as he is adjunctive to it: he is a service. (This narrow application of that old ghost in the attic, the medical model, didn't just sprout in the schools, the public voted it in there.) Because the school psychologist is just a service, during the last decade state certification laws began to drop the requirement of teaching experience for full school psychologist certification (Gross, Bonham, Bluestein, and Venus, 1966).

The school psychologist's image thus began to move even further from that of the educator - small wonder that the school psychologist so often is viewed as an outsider in matters not pertaining directly to handicapped pupils. Services are something to be purchased for a rather specific and in this case delimited purpose: working with the handicapped. The school, the territory for role development, is that of the educator and the school psychologist as a purchased service is at best in the status of a guest when he enters that territory and as he begins to develop his role.

The findings of numerous studies made during the last ten years indicate the persistence of the special education clinical-medical image but show also that the image is becoming more diffuse. In a recent article, Roberts and Solomon (1970) point out that there is not only inconsistency between the images of the school psychologist

and educator but inconsistency among school psychologists and within individual school psychologists. Thus, the same school psychologist may behave differently from school to school and even child to child depending upon the expectations of the educator and other variables in the setting. Bower (1964) has pointed out that professional competency is not necessarily a matter of doing one's job well so much as it is a matter of understanding the purpose of one's activities in the total setting. Along the same lines and in answer to Robert's and Solomon's concern for the apparent dissociative behavior of school psychologists, Bardon's (1968) remark that he has come to believe that "any school psychologist who is reliable is probably not valid" seems especially pertinent. It appears that the school psychologist who does not vary his role may not be adopting to the inevitably different and changing situations in which he works and so may be less successful in achieving his purposes.

For a while, a few years back, it looked as though states were beginning to envision a much broader and more encompassing role for school psychologists (Traxler, 1967). Certification standards seemed to be going up and some states had adopted much of the Division 16 Proposal for State Department of Education Certification of School Psychologists as part of their laws. A break with the narrow and limiting image so many school psychologists had complained about and attempted to dispell seemed in the offing. The chance to break with that image was there all right but the old reason, the root reason for mandating school psychologists to begin with had not disappeared. Instead, a vacuum was being created and

and state departments began to fill it with educators minimally trained in evaluation whose job it became to carry out much of the evaluation formerly held to be the province of the school psychologist. In New Jersey, this educator is called the Learning Disability Specialist and many school psychologists have noted that the services of school psychologists are now sometimes given lower priority in budgets and fewer are hired while another professional, the LDS is added to the staff. Legislation recently proposed in Texas would carry the situation in New Jersey several steps further. As I read it, that legislation would limit the school psychologist to working with children identified as emotionally disturbed and relegate all evaluation and team functioning to educators on the team.

For many school psychologists, having much of the burden of evaluation removed is a welcome change. If the role the school psychologist relegates to someone of lesser training can be equally well handled in the interest of the handicapped child, so much the better. However, much of the authority, the power of the position of school psychologist is based in the decision making process about placement and programs for handicapped children and evaluation is the crux of this process. If there is little need for him in the process of evaluation and placement, the school psychologist must have an image that makes him highly desirable to schools even though his is not a profession required by the state laws. I don't think school psychology as a profession has yet developed that kind of image in the eyes of educators nor the eyes of the

general public. Even individual school psychologists who have a firm reputation for their consulting skills in one district may have difficulty selling them in another district - so largely are such images personally rather than professionally based.

State departments of education are primarily concerned with the implementation of state laws. These laws link the school psychologist with special education. Leadership from the state level as it applies to the development of school psychology must compete with the other professions which also would like to see the state push for their development. There is growing evidence that an early bias favoring school psychology may be disappearing from state departments and from the laws. School psychologists are still the best-trained school personnel in the matter of the study of handicapped children, however. This image must be maintained in the interest of the handicapped and in the interest of the general development of psychology in the schools.

I hope that it has been obvious throughout my expressed concern for the image of the school psychologist as one who has a primary role in the evaluation of the handicapped that I also believe that other competencies should be developed in the student of school psychology and applied consistent with over-all goals and factors in a given work setting. Within the context of a given school a variety of roles should be developed. But without the image of expertise in dealing with the handicapped in the matter of placement and determination of educational program, I fear that school psychology and with it psychology in the schools may begin to suffer serious decline.

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